




Speech By
Deb Frecklington

MEMBER FOR NANANGO

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AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mrs FRECKLINGTON** (Nanango—LNP) (4.53 pm): I take pleasure in rising to support the Agricultural College Amendment Bill 2013. I thank the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Hon. Dr John McVeigh, for bringing this common-sense bill before the House. I also acknowledge the contribution from the Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee, which is chaired by Mr Ian Rickuss, the member for Lockyer, and note that the committee has recommended that this bill be passed. This common-sense piece of legislation is again delivering for Queenslanders. As a government, we are delivering on our election promises—that is, to build a four-pillar economy. Agriculture is one of the most important pillars of our great state. I would even hazard a guess that, from my regional perspective, it is the most important pillar, and I am quite sure that the Hon. Dr John McVeigh would agree with me on that point.

This bill is an important step to the reinvigoration of the agricultural colleges in Queensland. The ag colleges are simply the backbone of the education system of our next generation of farmers, graziers, landholders and workers on all of these great places. My brother Tim attended the Emerald ag college. My older brother went to Gatton ag, even though I appreciate that that is not affected in any manner by this bill. Interestingly, my older brother mentioned to me that it would probably be a good spot for me not to go to an ag college. Ross thought I might be safer not at one of the ag colleges, which is a bit of a concern. I would advocate that all good country girls and city girls should attend these great ag colleges. The AACC has delivered this training since 1967. It is owned by the Queensland government and has some 200 employees. It provides training at residential colleges, as noted, in Emerald and Longreach and six other training centres in Ayr, Bundaberg, Dalby, Gatton, Mackay and Mareeba. I would also like to extend that to add Kingaroy in there one day, so I will have to have those conversations with the minister.

As a regional member of this parliament, I fully understand the importance of access to decent, good agricultural training. In 2012 the AACC commissioned an independent review of ag colleges by Ernst & Young, and I have to say that this was one fantastic decision made by the Minister for Agriculture. We had colleges that were clearly being misrun. There were falling enrolment numbers and major financial difficulties, and that is what was discovered by Ernst & Young. When that review was taking place my office received a great deal of feedback from families explaining to me the absolute importance of these ag colleges. They said that they were just desperate to ensure that this training option was not lost for not only their children but also themselves. I have heard a few members in this House talk about children going to ag colleges. These colleges also provide further education for the older generation as well.

Many good country kids do grow up wanting to attend either the Emerald or Longreach college, and it was actually devastating when the Dalby ag college closed some time ago. These ag colleges provide a social framework to this generation and a network that they can build on as they move into their chosen field of agriculture. It was obvious that under the former Labor government the ag colleges under the AACC were becoming financially unviable. They had not operated profitably since

2005 and reports highlighted many inadequacies with the standards of simple reporting, record keeping and audit of compliance with workplace health and safety requirements. Whilst I could stand here and say that that was just typical of the previous government, what I am pleased to stand here and say is that this is typical of our government—that is, it is typical for our hardworking minister and our hardworking cabinet to take the decision that we need to look after our agricultural colleges.

Our government understands that letting these colleges go down the path that they were on previously is simply not an option. The Emerald Agricultural College and the Longreach Pastoral College deliver invaluable education for people all over Australia. It is not only for people from Queensland. We must encourage these young people to pursue employment and careers in our agricultural and pastoral industries to ensure that we reach our goal of doubling food production. There is also the element of what these colleges add to those great towns of Longreach and Emerald. That cannot be underestimated.

Quite clearly, the amendments contained in this bill before the House will restructure the AACC as a statutory body with a decision-making board with provisions for college boards. What a common-sense, practical way forward. Like the successful local hospital and health boards, these college boards understand how these regions work.

In my opinion, this legislation is an important step in ensuring that agriculture remains solid as one of Queensland's four pillars. Reaching this target requires increased productivity and an adaption of knowledge. That can be achieved through a highly skilled workforce. The restructure of the colleges and vocational training will ensure that the skill needs of our rural and regional employers are met.

I believe that the reinvigoration of our colleges has already begun. In December last year our can-do government awarded 10 agricultural industry scholarships to young people who are keen to access agricultural training. The minister made these scholarships available to help encourage the best minds and the best trained agricultural workforce possible and to demonstrate our commitment to supporting this important sector. One of the lucky scholarship recipients was Darren Close, who hails from Hampton in my electorate of Nanango. Darren's scholarship provides \$10,000 towards his tuition and board at the Longreach Pastoral College. I would like to congratulate Darren. Just last weekend I was speaking to his father, who told me he is very excited at receiving this scholarship and how far this \$10,000 will go towards his tuition. It is really exciting that someone from my electorate is benefiting in this way. I know that Darren will be a wonderful contributor to the future of agriculture in Queensland. I wish him well in his studies at Longreach. I hope he enjoys his time at agricultural college, as all good agricultural college attendees—

Mr Cox: Has he got a ute?

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: He has a ute. I am sure that he will have a great time. These agricultural colleges are not just about education. Whilst that is 99.9 per cent of the priority of these colleges; it is about the social network that students at these colleges can build and the mateship that they can build over time not only in Queensland, but across our great land of Australia.

In closing, this bill seeks to make changes to our agricultural colleges to underpin their viability and longevity. I thank the minister for this bill. I also fully support the bill.